

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-15 and 25-36 are pending herein, claims 1 and 25 being independent. By the amendment above, claims 1, 6, 9-11, 14, 15, 25-28 and 30 have been amended to more clearly point out the invention and thereby moot the Examiner's rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second para. In addition, claims 1 and 25 have been amended to point out that the telescopic guide elements are pre-assembled. No new matter has been added.

In the pending Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 6-15 and 25-36 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for various specified reasons; claims 1-4 and 25 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as allegedly anticipated by United States Patent No. 5,184,686 (Gonzalez); claims 5, 31 and 32 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly obvious over Gonzalez; and claims 6-15, 26-30 and 33-36 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly obvious over Gonzalez in view of United States Patent No. 3,333,432 (Hale, *et al.*), United States Patent No. 3,824,798 (Shiroyama, *et al.*), United States Patent No. 4,812,079 (Johnson, *et al.*), Japanese document 53-118791 or WIPO document EP 0952301.

After carefully considering the Examiner's rejections and the reasons offered in support thereof, the applicants nonetheless respectfully submit that their invention as claimed is patentably distinct from the references applied by the Examiner, taken alone or in combination, and that the claims are in allowable form. Accordingly, withdrawal of the final rejection and allowance of the claims as amended is respectfully solicited.

As a preliminary matter, it is noted that the specific instances recited by the Examiner as rendering the claims indefinite have been addressed, except for the allegedly "confusing" recitation that the "intermediate soleplate supports at least one of the curved intermediate portion and rear portion" inasmuch as the intermediate soleplate is distributed along both elements. It is

respectfully submitted that this is not confusing since the intermediate soleplate may *support* only one of the two elements while being distributed along the both of them. This is not logically inconsistent and the applicants are not required to claim an instance in which support is provided to both elements if not necessary to distinguish over the art. Accordingly, this aspect of the rejection pursuant to 35 U.S.C. § 112, second para., is traversed. Withdrawal of this rejection in its entirety is therefore respectfully solicited.

Turning to the rejections over the applied references, the following description of the invention is taken from the specification and is provided for the Examiner's convenience. It is not intended to argue limitations not present in the claims, or to impart a construction to any term in the claims that may be narrower or more limited than one of ordinary skill in the art would understand such term to have in the absence of this description.

The invention is directed to an off-shore drilling installation, and a method of drilling off-shore using such an installation. The installation includes a guide device disposed on the sea bottom, at least one drilling riser extending from a floating support on the surface of the water to the guide device and a drill string having a drilling tool fitted on one end thereof for drilling into the sea bottom. The guide device includes a telescopic guide pipe made up of at least two pre-assembled coaxial telescopic guide elements: an outer guide element and an inner guide element. The inner guide element is disposed within the outer guide element and is also extendable from a retracted position within the outer guide element to a deployed position that is beyond the outer guide element. Using this telescoping arrangement of guide elements allows drilling to proceed more rapidly than possible with prior art arrangements.

The drilling arrangement of Gonzalez is one such prior art arrangement. Gonzalez discloses a method for offshore drilling having a sequential step-by-step drilling process.

According to this process, successive lengths of bores are drilled and then reinforced with casings. Gonzalez shows the use of separate casings 22 a,b,c, that are assembled on-site in sequence at successive depths (*see*, Figs. 5-8). As shown in Fig. 5, a bore is drilled, a casing 22a is placed into the bore, and then casing 22b (Fig. 6) is lowered into casing 22a and then through casing 22a (Figs. 7-8) to extend therethrough. These casings, which the Examiner has identified as corresponding to the claimed telescopic guide elements, are not in fact telescopic at all, as they are simply slidable with respect to one another. This is highlighted in Fig. 5, which shows the two casings completely separated. To further emphasize the difference between the claimed structure and that of Gonzalez, the claims have been amended to recite that the inventive guide elements are “pre-assembled”, to underscore the distinction that they are arranged telescopically.

In contradistinction thereto, Gonzalez’ casings 22 a,b,c are independent and separated from one another. This is why Gonzalez teaches that it is necessary to lift up drill bit 38 by lifting drill string 28 before any casing can be lowered (*see*, col. 3, lines 60-67; col. 4, lines 17-18). Gonzalez also teaches that this construction requires a cementing operation around each successive casing (col. 4, lines 9-16).

The telescoping arrangement of pre-assembled guide elements according to the invention overcomes the need for the removing of the drill string or cementing the telescoped elements until the completion of the operation. Thus, the inventive arrangement and method provide for faster, cheaper and more efficient drilling in a complex and rapidly changing environment.

For all these reasons, it is respectfully submitted that the invention as claimed is neither taught nor suggested by Gonzalez. The addition of the other references applied by the Examiner overcome none of the drawbacks of Gonzalez, and so likewise fail to teach or suggest the

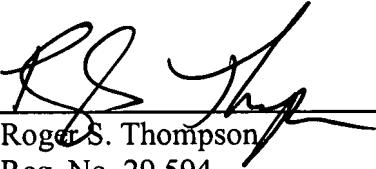
invention as claimed. Thus, it is respectfully submitted that the invention as claimed presents allowable subject matter in light of the applied art, and is in allowable form.

Early and favorable action is therefore respectfully solicited.

It is believed that no further fees or charges are required at this time in connection with the present application. However, if any fees or charges are required at this time, they may be charged to our Patent and Trademark Office Deposit Account No. 03-2412.

Respectfully submitted,
COHEN PONTANI LIEBERMAN & PAVANE LLP

By _____


Roger S. Thompson
Reg. No. 29,594
551 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1210
New York, New York 10176
(212) 687-2770

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